

# Caregiver Connection

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A monthly publication for Washington state foster and adoptive families and relative caregivers.  
WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES, CHILDREN'S ADMINISTRATION

## Coping with grief and loss

Grief is a natural response to loss. It's the emotional suffering you feel when something or someone you love is taken away. Any loss can cause grief, including:

- The ending of a relationship
- Separation from a significant person
- Loss of health
- Changes in a role or job
- Loss of financial stability
- A miscarriage
- Death of a family member
- Death of a pet
- Loss of a cherished dream
- A loved one's serious illness
- Loss of a friendship
- Loss of safety after a trauma



You may experience grief when a foster child leaves your home. Certainly, parents are grieving when their children have been placed in care. And children being placed in your home are experiencing grief related to their removal, changing schools, losing contact with friends, worrying about their parents, missing their pets...the list is a long one.

In 1969, psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross introduced what became known as the "five stages of grief."

- Denial: "This can't be happening to me."
- Anger: "Why is this happening? Who is to blame?"
- Bargaining: "Make this not happen, and in return I will \_\_\_\_."
- Depression: "I'm too sad to do anything."
- Acceptance: "I'm at peace with what happened."

If you are experiencing any of these emotions following a loss, or observe these emotions in others, it may help to know that the reaction is natural and that healing will come in time.

### Grief is a roller coaster, not a series of stages

However, it is best not to think of grief as a series of stages. Rather, we might think of the grieving process as a roller coaster, full of ups and downs, highs and lows. Like many roller coasters, the ride tends to be rougher in the beginning; the lows may be deeper and longer. The difficult periods should become less intense and shorter as time goes by, but it takes time to work through a loss. Even years after a loss, especially at special events such as a family wedding or the birth of a child, we may still experience a strong sense of grief.

### Common symptoms of grief

While loss affects people in different ways, many people experience the following symptoms when they're grieving. Just remember that almost anything that you experience in the early stages of grief is normal.

- Shock and disbelief – Right after a loss, it can be hard to accept what happened. You may feel numb, have trouble believing that the loss really happened, or even deny the truth.
- Sadness – Profound sadness is probably the most universally experienced symptom of grief. You may have feelings of emptiness, despair, yearning, or deep loneliness. You may also cry a lot or feel emotionally unstable.

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## Meet the Clifner clan

"We used to be a quiet family," says Pam Clifner. But that was years ago when the Clifners were only four – mom Pam and dad Lonny, plus daughter Jocelyn and son Lane (now 17 and 14). Today, the Clifners include adopted children Shane, 11, Nate, 10, Carmen, 9, and Madelyn, 9; and brothers Tyler and Brenden, 9 and 5, who will be Clifners very soon. Not so quiet anymore!

All of this started in 2005 when Pam went to Guatemala on a mission trip to build a parsonage. She met the pastor and his wife who were raising 13 orphans in addition to their 3 birth children. Pam and Lonny wondered if there was a need for families in their home community. There was! Their foster parenting lives were about to begin!

Pam and Lonny say that their hearts are really with older kids who need to stop moving around. Pam comments, "Our family is made up of amazing personalities that each add and enhance the next person. They help each other to heal when they understand what the other kid may have experienced in their previous homes."

Not so quiet anymore. Pam and Lonny agree that they have seen many challenges and many triumphs in the five years they have been fostering. Sometimes it is just plain hard! But they also agree that their ability to laugh out loud has gotten them this far. Pam tells the story of the Alaskan cruise they took with everyone last year. As they were headed through customs, Pam took a mental picture of their motley crew as she stood in line with 10 birth certificates, passports, paperwork "to prove we were not smuggling anyone", 3 last names, and 8 smiling kids. She and Lonny burst out laughing at the crazy picture they presented.

Pam and Lonny credit their church with supporting them through thick and thin. They depend on their faith to get them through each and every situation. "Our church family in Loon Lake is amazing," says Pam.

"Our lives have been enriched. We have learned truly to live with our cup filled up all the time. One struggling day raising them does not even match to the struggles they had before our home." Pam's passion shines through her statements. "Our #1 extracurricular activity is being a family. I know that sounds crazy, but all too often in life we can get really filled up with distractions that take away from what is really important – and that is relationships."

But this busy family is involved in many activities – their horses are at the center of much of it. Then there is also AWANA, 4H, youth groups, and camping.

Not so quiet anymore. But the quiet is not missed. Pam smiles as she says, "Lonny and I will keep going as long as we are breathing."



BACK ROW: Jocelyn, Lonny, Pam, Lane  
MIDDLE ROW: Carmen, Shane, Madelyn, Nate  
FRONT ROW: Brenden, Tyler

Continued from front cover

- **Guilt** – You may regret or feel guilty about things you did or didn't say or do. You may also feel guilty about certain feelings (e.g. feeling relieved when the person died after a long, difficult illness). Children may feel responsible for causing the loss, even though they did nothing wrong.
- **Anger** – Even if the loss was nobody's fault, you may feel angry and resentful. You may feel the need to blame someone for the injustice that was done to you.
- **Fear** – A significant loss can trigger a host of worries and fears. You may feel anxious, helpless, or insecure. You may even have panic attacks.
- **Physical symptoms** – We often think of grief as a strictly emotional process, but grief often involves physical problems, including fatigue, nausea, lowered immunity, weight loss or weight gain, aches and pains, and insomnia.

The single most important factor in healing from loss is having the support of other people. You can help the children in your care heal by asking about their feelings, spending time just being with them, and listening when they want to talk.

But remember that being a foster or relative caregiver will sometimes lead to your own feelings of loss. When you're grieving, it's more important than ever to take care of yourself. The stress of a major loss can quickly deplete your energy and emotional reserves. Looking after your physical and emotional needs will help you get through this difficult time.

- **Face your feelings.** You can try to suppress your grief, but you can't avoid it forever. In order to heal, you have to acknowledge the pain. Unresolved grief can also lead to complications such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and health problems.
- **Express your feelings in a tangible or creative way.** Write about your loss in a journal. Or write a letter to the one who is gone. Even if you can't mail it, you will feel better.
- **Look after your physical health.** The mind and body are connected. When you feel good physically, you'll also feel better emotionally. Combat stress and fatigue by getting enough sleep, eating right, and exercising. Don't use alcohol or drugs to numb the pain of grief or lift your mood artificially.
- **Don't let anyone tell you how to feel, and don't tell yourself how to feel either.** Your grief is personal. Let yourself – and the children in your home – feel whatever you feel without embarrassment or judgment. It's okay to be angry, to yell at the heavens, to cry or not to cry. It's also okay to laugh, to find moments of joy, and to let go when you're ready.
- **Plan ahead for grief "triggers".** Anniversaries, holidays, and milestones can reawaken memories and feelings. Be prepared for an emotional wallop, and know that it's completely normal.

Feelings of grief and loss can be uncomfortable and overwhelming, especially for children, whose coping skills are not fully developed. But the feelings are common, maybe even inevitable. Keep a look out for signs of grieving – in the children you serve, in the families you work with, and yes, even in yourself. Having a plan and knowing where to look for support will help you get through it.

You can too.

## You have a right to be heard!

The ability of caregivers to have a voice at court hearings has improved greatly over the years. Some of you may remember when you were an invisible and silent entity when it came to court hearings and shared planning meetings. Things improved several years ago when caregivers were given the opportunity to be heard in court and were to be invited to staffings and meetings regarding the children in their home. If they couldn't attend in person, they could submit a written report. But the biggest change came in 2007 when statute changed giving caregivers the right to be heard in court. With these rules in place, the courts expect that a caregiver has been given timely notification of hearings and they will not proceed if the caregiver has not been notified properly. Written notice must be provided at least 14 days prior to any regularly scheduled meeting.

It is important to remember that the right to be heard does not give caregivers legal standing in a case. The court will make the decision as to whether and how the caregiver will provide input at the hearing. The important message, though, is that caregivers have valuable information regarding the children in their care and their input needs to be considered when making case decisions.

We encourage you to be a voice for the children in your home and to attend hearings and meetings as a member of the team.



## Mind and body

HELPING CHILDREN GROW UP HEALTHY

FROM

[www.NMHA.org](http://www.NMHA.org)

It is easy for caregivers to identify a child's physical needs—nutritious and balanced meals; adequate shelter and clothing; sufficient rest and physical activity; immunizations; and a healthy living environment.

However, a child's mental and emotional needs may not be as obvious. Good mental health allows children to think clearly, develop socially, learn new skills, build self-esteem, and develop a positive mental outlook.

### These are the basics for a child's good mental health:

- Give children unconditional love. Children need to know that your love does not depend on their accomplishments.
- Nurture children's confidence and self-esteem. Praise and encourage them. Set realistic goals for them. Be honest about your mistakes. Avoid sarcasm.
- Encourage children to play. Play time is as important to a child's development as food. Play helps children be creative, develop problem-solving skills and self-control, and learn how to get along with others.
- Enroll children in an after school activity, especially if they are otherwise home alone after school. This is a great way for kids to stay productive, learn something new, gain self-esteem and have something to look forward to during the week. Or check in on children after school if they are home alone. Children need to know that even if you're not there physically, you're thinking about them, and interested in how they spent their day and how they'll spend the rest of it.
- Provide a safe and secure environment. Fear can be very real for a child. Try to find out what is frightening him or her. Be loving, patient and reassuring, not critical.
- Give appropriate guidance and discipline when necessary. Be firm, but kind and realistic with your expectations. The goal is not to control the child, but to help him or her learn self-control.
- Communicate. Make time each day after work and school to listen to your children and talk with them about what is happening in their lives. Share emotions and feelings with your children.
- Get help. If you're concerned about your child's mental health, consult with the child's social worker. Teachers, guidance counselors or other adults in the child's life may have information about your child's behavior and may be able to provide some perspective. If you think there is a problem, seek professional help. Early identification and treatment can help children with mental health problems reach their full potential.

### Post Adoption **Support**

## If your adopted child is graduating from high school...

High school graduation may be one of the major events in your child's life at this time. We offer our warmest congratulations for having assisted your child in reaching this significant place in his/her life.

For children receiving adoption support it is also a milestone in their eligibility for the program. If your child is turning 18 and will graduate this year, you must notify the Adoption Support Program of that event. You should have already received a letter from the program advising you that Adoption Support will terminate when your 18 year old graduates from high school. If you have not received a letter, please contact your Adoption Support Consultant – see the list above. You may call the program's toll free number if you do not know who to talk to. The number is 1-800-562-5682.

## Regional Contacts

### Region 1 – Spokane

Jan Lammers 509-363-3383  
Pam Copeland 509-363-3379

### Region 2 – Yakima

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Cheryl Barrett 360-725-6758  
Kim Mower 360-725-6778

### Headquarters – Olympia

Lonnie Locke 360-902-7932

**Toll free number:** 1-800-562-5682  
(listen carefully to the recorded message)



# Important numbers to know when you take care of children in out-of-home care

Foster Parent and Caregiver Crisis and Support Line: 1-800-301-1868

## ON-GOING AND CRISIS SUPPORTS FOR FOSTER PARENTS

Under contracts with the state, three private agencies are working to build supports for you within the foster care community. Supports include hubs, support groups, and matching new foster parents with veteran foster parents. To get connected:

- If you live in Eastern Washington, the Olympic Peninsula down through Pacific County or from Thurston County to Clark County, call 1-888-794-1794.
- If you live in King County or any counties north of King County, call 206-605-0664.
- If you live in Pierce or Kitsap counties, call 253-473-9252.
- If you live in King County, the Friends of Youth CARE program provides short-term counseling, education and support to help you care for your most difficult children. 1-888-263-3457 or 206-915-0459.

**Family Help Line:** 1-800-932-HOPE or [www.parenttrust.org](http://www.parenttrust.org). The Family Help Line is a free, statewide training and referral line for the families of Washington state. Last year, the Family Help Line received more than 5,000 calls and requests for information. Calls can last up to 90 minutes and parents can call as often as needed.

**Support for foster parents under investigation for allegations of abuse or neglect:** Foster Parent Investigation Retention Support Team (FIRST) 253-219-6782. Monday through Saturday, 8:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m., or leave a message and receive a return call within 24 hours.

Foster Parent and Caregiver Crisis and Support Line: 1-800-301-1868

**Mental Health Crisis Line Information:** The crisis line telephone number for your county or region is available on the DSHS Mental Health Division website at: <http://www.dshs.wa.gov/mentalhealth/crisis.shtml>.

## GENERAL FOSTER PARENT INFORMATION FOR THE STATE OF WASHINGTON

FPAWS: Foster Parent Association of Washington State, 1-800-391-CARE (2273) or [www.fpaws.org](http://www.fpaws.org). FPAWS is seeking new members and supporting foster parents in many ways, including referrals to local associations.

Kitsap and Pierce County information about becoming a foster parent or to receive foster parent support: Foster Care Resource Network, 253-473-9252. Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. or leave a message and receive a return call by the next business day.

## RESOURCE INFORMATION AVAILABLE STATEWIDE

Get connected to information on resources in your area by calling 211 – a toll free number.

Children's Administration Foster Parent Website:

<http://www.dshs.wa.gov/ca/fosterparents/>

Children's Administration Foster Parent Training Website – Trainings are open to all licensed foster parents, licensed relative caregivers and unlicensed caregivers. For information about foster parent and caregiver training, check out:

<http://www.dshs.wa.gov/ca/fosterparents/training.asp>

## CHILDREN'S ADMINISTRATION FOSTER CARE LISTSERV

Join the 400 people who have subscribed to the List Serve

<http://listserv.wa.gov/cgi-bin/wa?SUBED1=fosterparents&&A=1> for updated information on resources for the work you do in caring for children.

Family Planning Services are designed to help avoid unwanted or mistimed pregnancy and are available through your local Community Service Office (CSO). Each CSO has a full time Family Planning Nurse to help provide services to Medicaid eligible clients. There is also a Family Planning hotline number 1-800-770-4334.

# New online courses for sexually aggressive and physically assaultive/aggressive youth

Two new online courses can help you create a safe and healthy environment for youth who have sexual or physically assaultive/aggressive behavior problems. Each training runs 1 hour 13 minutes. You must have completed these trainings to have children with these issues in your home. Find these trainings at: [www.dshs.wa.gov/ca/fosterparents/onGoingVid.asp](http://www.dshs.wa.gov/ca/fosterparents/onGoingVid.asp)

## Summer at the movies

Once again this year, some area theaters will be offering free or low cost movies on summer mornings. The Regal Free Family Film Festival will show G and PG rated movies on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays at 10:00am. The AMC Summer Movie Camp Program will offer movies once a week for \$1.00.

Be sure to check with your local theater to confirm that it is participating in these programs.

Have fun at the movies.

## A good news reminder!

Back in September 2008, a resource was added to support visits between siblings. An activity fee of up to \$7.50 per child per visit, can be reimbursed to caregivers for the costs of activities during the visits. This reimbursement can happen up to twice each month for every sibling who is in the care and custody of DSHS. Eligible expenses include:

- Admission to sports activities, museums, parks, etc
- Food
- Supplies for activities
- Classes

Caregivers will include the claim for reimbursement of these costs on their travel claims. You must include a receipt.

### This reimbursement is for:

- The child's activities. CA cannot reimburse a caregiver when they participate in an activity, of for other children in their care who also participate in the activity.
- Members of sibling groups where at least one of the siblings lives apart from the others.

The reimbursement is not for siblings who are not in the care and custody of DSHS, such as siblings who have been adopted, or returned home and the dependency dismissed.

This small resource can go a long way in enhancing and normalizing visits between siblings.